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After Four Months of Bombing

For four months now, the United States Air Force has been hitting North Vietnam with everything but the kitchen sink. The United States Navy has mined the major port of Haiphong and a passel of minor ones, sealing off the Hanoi Government from being supplied by water. The object of this new "get tough" stance was to put pressure on the Communists to negotiate an end to the unending war.

What has been the result? To all public intents and purposes, the Reds are not negotiating any more meaningfully now than they have in the past, whatever may be obtaining from all those frantic secret sessions between the peripatetic Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. As for North Vietnam collapsing from the weight of American bombs and the naval noose drawn tightly around its neck, secret reports to the White House from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Air Force, somehow unearthed by the New York Times which seems to have a penchant for this sort of thing, indicate that the enemy has not been daunted in the slightest.

The North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam continue to be supplied regularly, and Hanoi reportedly has

dispatched 20,000 fresh troops (and their supplies) to the battle zones while the intensive bombings continue. Beyond that, the South Vietnamese now fear that the enemy is about to launch a new offensive.

Once again, with their by now storied "ant tactics," the North Vietnamese have check-mated Western technology. To replace the oil brought in formerly by ship, they have built four-inch petroleum pipelines to the borders of China. These, of course, can and are hit frequently by American bombs — but, just as frequently, they are repaired in a matter of hours and the oil keeps flowing. As for the tons upon tons of supplies, these continue to move down jungle trails on human backs. When the bombs fall, the bearers take cover. Immediately after the bombardment, movement resumes. The war goes on.

As a consequence, Tad Szulc of the Times reports: "The CIA and the DIA concur in the judgment that the Communists can sustain the fighting at its present rate for two more years, regardless of the bombing." That is why Hanoi is in no hurry to negotiate. It is also why this war has been so frustrating to the most powerful nation on earth.